

Project Overview

PROJECT PARTNERS

Audubon Society
 Bridgeton Neighborhood Assn.
 City of Fairview
 City of Gresham
 City of Maywood Park
 City of Portland

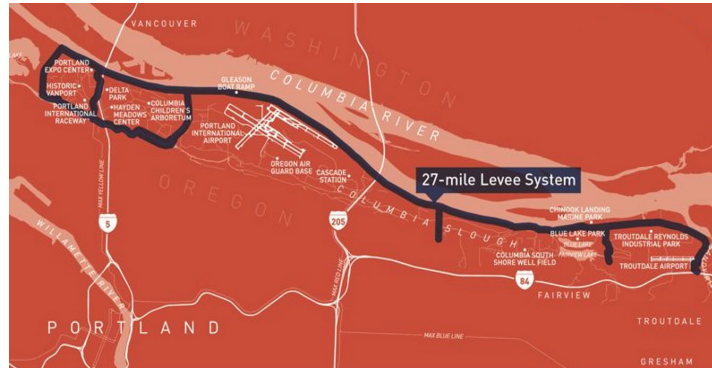
- Bureau of Environmental Services
- Parks & Recreation
- Bureau of Transportation
- Water Bureau

City of Troutdale
 Columbia Corridor Association
 Columbia Slough Watershed Council
 East Columbia Neighborhood Assn.
 Federal Emergency Management Agency
 Jubitz Corporation
 Metro
 Multnomah County
 Multnomah County Drainage District
 Peninsula Drainage District #1
 Peninsula Drainage District #2
 Port of Portland
 Sandy Drainage Improvement Company
 State of Oregon

- Dept. of Environmental Quality
- Dept. of Land Conservation & Development
- Governor's Regional Solutions Team

US Army Corps of Engineers

Four separate drainage districts are responsible for managing the 27-mile levee system that runs along the Columbia River from the railroad berm



that runs along N. Portland Road, out to Troutdale and the confluence of the Columbia and Sandy Rivers on the east: 1) Peninsula Drainage District #1 (PEN 1), 2) Peninsula Drainage District #2 (PEN 2), 3) Multnomah County Drainage District (MCDD), and 4)

Sandy Drainage Improvement Company (SDIC). These districts encompass 13,000 acres (about the size of the City of Beaverton by land area). Each district is an independent governmental entity with its own governing board and authority to collect assessments. The largest district, MCDD, has administered and provided services to the other three drainage districts on a contracted basis since 1997 and is the only district with staff.

The levee system was originally constructed between 1917 and 1921 by local farmers and business interests that wanted to be able to use their lands along the Columbia River year-round. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) made significant improvements to the system following Congress' passage of the 1936 Flood Control Act, and again after the Vanport Flood of 1948, which killed at least 15 people and displaced another 18,000 in one day.

As the local sponsors of the levee system, the drainage districts are responsible for compliance with federal levee safety standards set by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and USACE. For local mapholders (the cities) and property owners in the historical floodplain to remain eligible for FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), the levees must maintain certification and accreditation through FEMA. As long as the levee system is accredited, FEMA does not classify the historical floodplain behind the levees as a Special Flood Hazard Area, which means existing and new development is not required to build to floodplain standards. The system must also maintain compliance with USACE's Rehabilitation & Inspection Program, which assists in flood fighting and repairs in the event of a flood.

Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, FEMA and USACE overhauled the federal levee requirements, raising standards significantly for local sponsors. Locally, this led to early expiration of FEMA certification in all four districts, which could lead to FEMA revoking accreditation and remapping the area as a 100-year floodplain at any time.



The Levee Ready Columbia partnership was established in 2013 to work toward addressing the deficiencies in the levee system in order to maintain FEMA accreditation and local access to the NFIP. A Governor designated Oregon Solutions project, Levee Ready Columbia is comprised of the City of Portland, City of Gresham, City of Fairview, City of Troutdale, Metro, Multnomah County, Port of Portland, the four Columbia Corridor drainage districts, the State of Oregon, and neighborhood, private sector, and public interest nonprofit leaders. Since its inception, the Levee Ready Columbia partners have completed the first ever comprehensive geotechnical assessment of the system to identify deficiencies, and are in the process of planning the necessary repairs to recertify and modernize the levees.

In addition to physical deficiencies within the system, there is also a need to address the challenges associated with the governance and funding structures of the drainage districts. Originally established in 1917, the drainage districts were put in place to maintain drainage for local agricultural and industrial interests. Over 100 years later, those same structures are still in place despite significant land use changes and growth in the Columbia Corridor. Continuing to operate four independent agencies is inefficient and inadequate to meet shifting federal standards and continued growth in the area. Furthermore, in three of the four districts, the assessment structure is subject to the effects of compression, the process used to reduce property taxes under Oregon's Measure 5 and 50 limits. Unlike other taxing districts, the drainage districts are allowed to raise assessments to compensate for the revenue loss due to compression. This creates significant inequities in the amounts paid by similar properties, and the inequity continues to grow as fees are increased, which causes more properties to be subject to compression and magnifies the amount collected from the properties that are not yet under compression.

Aside from occasional assistance from USACE, all of the costs of operating and maintaining the levee system have been borne by the properties within the four drainage districts for over twenty years. This area is, however, an important economic driver for the county, region, and state, generating about \$16 billion of economic activity annually and providing over 59,000 jobs. The area encompassing the drainage districts is also home to over 7,500 residents, a large share of the region's buildable industrial lands, Oregon's 2nd largest source of drinking water, the Portland International Airport (PDX), and many other social and environmental resources. To address the ongoing challenges, a more equitable funding structure is needed to provide contributions commensurate with the benefits received by areas outside of the districts.

As a result of the partnerships' advocacy, and help from Oregon's federal delegation, Congress recently designated a USACE "New Start" feasibility study of the local levee system, which will determine whether the federal government should reinvest in the system. This is a huge opportunity for the community as the study could lead to federal assistance of up to 65% of the cost for current and future levee improvement projects. With the study underway, the LRC partners are now pursuing an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) to ensure close coordination with USACE and that local priorities and values are well represented throughout the feasibility study process. This IGA will also keep the partnership going through the implementation of the recommended governance and funding structure and the improvements needed to recertify the levee system to maintain accreditation and access to the NFIP.

Levee Ready Columbia Staff:

Colin Rowan
Program Director
crowan@mcdd.org

Mark Wilcox
Sr. Project Manager
mwilcox@mcdd.org

Eryn Mitchell
Communications & Public Affairs Mgr.
emitchell@mcdd.org